

Remarks on the Minimum Wage

April 30, 2014

The President. Thank you, everybody. Please have a seat. Good afternoon.

Audience member. Aloha!

The President. Aloha. [*Laughter*] Got a Hawaiian guy here.

After 14 months since I've called on Congress to reward the hard work of millions of Americans like the ones who we have here today to raise the Federal minimum wage, we saw this morning a majority of Senators saying yes, but almost every Republican saying no to giving America a raise.

They blocked a bill sponsored by Tom Harkin and Congressman George Miller, who is right here in front, a bill that would have gradually raised the minimum wage from \$7.25 an hour to \$10.10 an hour. By preventing even a vote on this bill, they prevented a raise for 28 million hard-working Americans. They said no to helping millions work their way out of poverty. And keep in mind, this bill would have done so without any new taxes or spending or bureaucracy. They told Americans like the ones who are here today that you're on your own, without even looking them in the eye.

Now, we know these Americans. We depend on them. The workers who'd benefit from a minimum wage increase often work full time, often in physically demanding jobs. They average 35 years of age. Most low-paying jobs are held by women. But because Republicans in Congress said no to even allowing a vote on the floor of the Senate, these folks are going to have to wait for the raise they deserve.

Now, the good news is, outside of Washington, folks aren't waiting. While Republicans have been deciding whether to even allow a minimum wage bill to come up for a vote, you've seen 10 States and the District of Columbia go ahead and raise theirs. Yesterday the Hawaii Legislature voted to raise their minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour. Maryland did the same thing earlier this month, and I know we've got some Maryland State legislators here today. Thanks for the good work.

So the actions that have been taken in just four States—Maryland, Connecticut, Minnesota, and Hawaii—means that over a million workers will see a raise. What's more, we've seen big companies like the Gap and small businesses—from a pizza joint in St. Louis to an ice cream parlor in Florida—increasingly choosing to raise wages for their employees because they know it's good business. They know that it means employees are more likely to stay on the job, less turnover. It means that they're going to be more productive and customers see the difference. That's one of the reasons I issued an Executive order requiring employees on new Federal contracts to be paid a fair wage of at least \$10.10 an hour.

So Americans have been way out in front of Congress on this issue. In fact, about three in four Americans support raising the minimum wage. And that's because we believe that in the wealthiest nation on Earth, nobody who works full time should ever have to raise a family in poverty. That's a basic principle. And at a time when those at the top are doing better than ever, while millions of Americans are working harder and harder just to get by, that three out of four Americans understands that America deserves a raise.

A few months ago, I got a letter from a woman named Sheila Artis. And Sheila lives in Lilburn, Georgia, and at the time she was working two jobs, making \$8 an hour at each job. As Sheila wrote, "I do not have days off, I have hours off." But she kept going to work every day because she wanted to be able to afford college tuition for her daughter. And so she wrote to me and said: "I do not want a pot of gold. All I want is to pay for college and pay my bills in full every month." That's all she's looking for. Doesn't expect to get wealthy, just wants to be able to pay the bills at the end of every month, be able to act responsibly, meet her responsibilities based on her own hard work.

People like Sheila deserve a fair shot. So far Republicans in Congress disagree. In fact, some of them want to scrap the minimum wage entirely. One House Republican said: "It's outlived its usefulness. I'd vote to repeal the minimum wage." A Senate Republican said he doesn't think the minimum wage helps the middle class.

This is a very simple issue. Either you're in favor of raising wages for hard-working Americans or you're not. Either you want to grow the economy from the middle out and the bottom up so that prosperity is broad based, or you think that top-down economics is the way to go.

Republicans in Congress have found the time to vote more than 50 times to undermine or repeal the health care bill for millions of working families. Earlier this month, they voted for a budget that would give the wealthiest Americans a massive tax cut while forcing deep cuts to investments that help middle class families. But they won't raise wages for millions of working families when three-quarters of Americans support it? That makes no sense. And on top of that, they've blocked our efforts to make sure women receive equal pay for equal work. They've stood in the way as we've fought to extend unemployment insurance for parents who need a little help supporting their families while they're out looking for work. Republicans have failed to dismantle the Affordable Care Act, and they've increasingly failed to do anything when it comes to helping people who work hard to get ahead.

If there's any good news here, it's that Republicans in Congress don't get the last word on this or any issue; you do, the American people, the voters. Change is happening, whether Republicans in Congress like it or not. And so my message to the American people is this: Do not get discouraged by a vote like the one we saw this morning. Get fired up. Get organized. Make your voices heard. And rest assured, I'm going to keep working with you and Leader Nancy Pelosi and other Members of Congress who are here today to raise wages for hard-working Americans. It's the right thing to do.

If your Member of Congress doesn't support raising the minimum wage, you've got to let them know they're out of step and that if they keep putting politics ahead of working Americans, you'll put them out of office. Tell them to reconsider. Tell them it's time for \$10.10. You can tweet at them: Use hashtag #1010Means. Let them know how raising the minimum wage would help you or your family or somebody that you know. And while you're at it, tell them to restore unemployment insurance for Americans who are trying to support their families right now while they look for work. Extending this lifeline of unemployment insurance would actually strengthen the economy and create jobs and give millions of Americans across the country a sense of hope.

In the meantime, I'm going to keep offering my support to every business owner and mayor and Governor and county official and legislator and organization that's working to give America a raise. Because change does not come from Washington, it comes to Washington from all the folks out there who were working hard. Americans want the people they send here

to set aside the old political arguments and move this country forward. With enough determination and enough persistence, the American people will ultimately win out.

So thank you, God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:02 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Rep. Joseph L. Barton.

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